

Homily
Funeral Mass for Reverend Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.
Chapel of the Holy Spirit
Campion Center
Weston, Massachusetts
April 26, 2016

Reverend Monsignor William Manning Helmick
delivered by Reverend Robert J. Levens, S.J.
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To begin this homily at the Funeral Mass of my brother, I would like to express his profound gratitude, my sister Marie's gratitude, and my own gratitude for the extraordinary care, attention, and love he received these last 3½ years here at Campion Center and at Massachusetts General Hospital. We will never be able to express adequately our thanks to Father Robert Levens, the Superior here at Campion Center, to Father Terrence Curry, the Minister of this holy house, to the members of the Campion Jesuit Community- - - after 3½ years, you have been completely instructed in geo-political, environmental, liturgical and other ecclesiastical affairs- - - and the Jesuits here have been so extraordinarily kind and present to Raymond, especially in the past few weeks and days leading up to last Thursday morning at 12:42. Nor will we be able to express our thanks to the staff here at Campion- - - the nurses, the nursing assistants, the therapists, the drivers, the maintenance staff, and everyone else who took care of him- - - despite his insistence on trying to do everything himself. In particular, our gratitude goes to Doctor Christina Ferrone, the surgeon who saved his life 11 months ago in a seven hour emergency procedure at MGH, to Doctor David Ryan and to Doctor Theodore (Ted) Hong at Mass General, who kept Raymond going for the past eleven months, helping him to preserve his life and maintain his hope and his spirit and more recently to Doctor Hackett here at Campion. I have often thought, during the past few months, that Raymond looked upon his body as an antique car, and thought someone would always be able to find parts to repair the broken parts. We are so grateful to all of you for trying so hard to make it happen!

Raymond was a person- - - like a precious jewel- - - with many facets to his being. Among other things, he was a proud and committed Jesuit. I told Father Levens last week a fascinating story about an event last September when he came to my parish- - - Saint Theresa of Avila in West Roxbury- - - to concelebrate a Funeral Mass. After Mass, I went to the cemetery, and Raymond had lunch in the Rectory with the priests. When I got back from the cemetery, lunch was over, so I had a quick bite in the kitchen and went upstairs to check on Raymond. I could not find him in his room, having

checked out the bathroom, having looked on both sides of the bed to make sure he had not fallen.

I looked all over the second floor, and then my Secretary, Carol O'Brien, did a complete search of the first floor. At one point, Mrs. O'Brien told me that Raymond had mentioned wanting to do some errands. I asked her to check the garage and see if his car was there. She replied that the car was gone, and for the next 45 minutes or so, I was waiting for a call from the Boston Police announcing Raymond had been in an accident.

When he returned, he stood at the door of my office, and I said to him: "Raymond, we have been looking all over the place for you." He told me he had gone to do some errands. I asked him where he had gone, and he said he had gone up to Walgreens Pharmacy. And I said: "Gee, Raymond, in your condition, that is a long walk on a hot, sunny day." He then confessed: "*I took the car.*" And I said: "*Raymond, I thought the Jesuits had a vow of obedience.*" He looked at me and said: "*I did not disobey my Jesuit Superior. I disobeyed my doctor.*" He walked away, took the elevator, and went upstairs. I sat there at my desk laughing out loud with my secretary, and said: "*What point is there in talking to someone like this person?*"

I am sure we all have many personal recollections of Raymond. His characteristics and accomplishments are too many and diverse to be recounted in this homily. A complex but remarkable priest, scholar, artist, negotiator, political analyst has gone from this life to the life of heaven.

In the readings at today's Mass, we can see glimpses of Father Ray Helmick. The Reading from the Book of Lamentations gives us a view of how he must have felt inside when his health began to fail with his fall and injuries at Saint Mary's Hall in December of 2012.

*"My soul is deprived of peace,
I have forgotten what happiness is;
I tell myself my future is lost,
all that I hoped for from the Lord."*

Raymond must have had all those negative sentiments about himself, but he did not yield to them. Rather, within 4 weeks he was back in the classroom, in the new Stokes Building at B.C., teaching from his wheelchair, using the Chocolate Bar for his meetings with his students. He flew in the back of the plane, to give a speech in Taiwan one week and then he flew for another speech in Iceland the following week. He had an inexhaustible determination to do as much good as he could do for the Greater Glory of God, for the Church, for his students, and for the establishment of justice and peace, no matter the personal cost.

Until only very recently, despite his weakness and the pain he endured, he was on his computer writing and sending detailed emails about this and that ecclesiastical matter or international political crisis. And so, we can take great comfort this morning from the final words of this Reading from Lamentations:

*"I will call this to mind as my reason to bear hope.
The favors of the Lord are not exhausted,
His mercies are not spent;
They are renewed each morning,
So great is His (God's) faithfulness."*

We can be sure that Raymond is experiencing the boundless favors of the Lord this morning as we pray for him at his Funeral Mass.

We can find another glimpse of Raymond's life and his character in the Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians we heard at this Mass. It is among the best known passages of the New Testament Scripture---- Saint Paul's description of Charity - - -

"Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous. It does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails."

Anyone who really knew my brother knew and experienced his genuine, patient, priestly love for one and for all - - - even the gentleman from the Ulster Defense Army who broke into his bedroom in London after midnight one day with the intention of shooting him. Raymond very patiently and lucidly persuaded that man that killing him was a bad idea, which would do no good to the cause of peace in Ireland, and gave the man some sound doctrine about peace being the fruit of justice and charity.

In all of this, Raymond, as idealistic and as kind as he was, had a profound understanding of the human condition. He knew that good people sometimes do bad things, and he worked patiently with anyone to steer them away from evil and in the direction of goodness, justice and peace. A priest friend of mine from New York, Monsignor Lorenzo Albacette, often told people that he carried Raymond's photograph with his own passport, with the intention -- if ever he was on a plane that was being hijacked - - - of getting my brother's photo, jumping up, and saying: "Don't shoot! I am a friend of Father Ray Helmick!" The last words of Saint Paul's description of charity, which we heard this morning were: "Love never fails." All of us have experienced this quality of charity in my brother.

In the Gospel of Saint John at Mass today, we just heard Our Lord's description of Himself: *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."* It is a great consolation to know that my brother made Jesus his way of living. He recognized the Lord Jesus as the Truth to whom he was so faithfully dedicated. He knew that Jesus is the Life to whom he tenaciously held in every circumstance, good or bad, until his last conscious moment.

We heard in the Gospel today how Thomas the Apostle reacted when Jesus said: *"Where I am going, you know the way."* Thomas responded: *"Lord, we do not know where You are going! How can we know the way?"*

Our Lord was talking about the way to Heaven. Father Raymond Helmick certainly knew the way to Heaven. He found his way there as a son, brother, uncle, cousin, friend, teacher, writer, peacemaker, artist, counselor, and most especially, for most of his life, as a Priest of the Society of Jesus. And so, I will end with a prayer which is attributed to Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a prayer which gives us one more glimpse of my brother, Raymond.

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding, and
my entire will- - - all that I have and
possess. You have given all to me.
To You, O Lord, I return it. Dispose of
it wholly according to Your will. Give
Me only Your love and Your grace,
For this is sufficient for me.*

May his soul, the souls of Alice and Raymond Helmick and the souls of all the Faithful Departed, through the mercy of God, rest in Peace.

AMEN.